



BRIEFING: MAY 2012 BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM #13

TO: Tom Fellenz, Acting Chief Executive Officer

FROM: John Popoff, Program Deputy Director
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DATE: May 3, 2012

RE: Item 13: Blending Update/Caltrain

Background

On April 18th, 2011, Congresswoman Eshoo, State Senator Simitian and State Assembly Member Gordon released a statement on "High Speed Rail." The Authority has long seen Caltrain and the cities on the Peninsula as valuable partners in defining the vision for the Caltrain corridor. The Authority strongly agrees with the statement by Congresswoman Eshoo, State Senator Simitian and State Assembly Member Gordon that a statewide high-speed train system should: "...makes prudent use of limited public funds and which is responsive to legitimate concerns about the impact of high-speed rail on our cities, towns, neighborhoods and homes."

In addition to defining broad goals for the statewide HST system, the statement offered observations about the Authority and its performance as a state agency, and also provided specific recommendations regarding the design and operation of the high speed train system on the Caltrain corridor between San Francisco and San Jose (SF to SJ).

The Legislator's statement specifically attempted to describe what "high-speed rail done right" would look like on the Caltrain corridor. Their statement recommended the following:

- **Aerial Options:** "We explicitly reject the notion of high-speed rail running from San Jose to San Francisco on an elevated structure or "viaduct"; and we call on the High-Speed Rail Authority to eliminate further consideration of an aerial option;"
- **Right of Way:** "We fully expect that high-speed rail running from San Jose to San Francisco can and should remain within the existing CalTrain right of way."
- **Blended Service:** "Within the existing right-of-way, at or below grade, a single blended system could allow high-speed rail arriving in San Jose to continue north in a seamless fashion as part of a 21st Century CalTrain (using some combination of electrification, positive train control, new rolling

stock and/or other appropriate upgrades) while maintaining the currently projected speeds and travel time for high-speed rail.”

- **EIR Analysis:** “...consistent with a project of this more limited scope, the Authority should abandon its preparation of an EIR (Environmental Impact Report) for a phased project of larger dimensions over a 25 year timeframe. Continuing to plan for a project of this scope in the face of limited funding and growing community resistance is a fool’s errand; and is particularly ill-advised when predicated on ridership projections that are less than credible.”

As a result of the April 18th, 2011 statement, the High Speed Rail Authority Board at their May 4th, 2011 meeting directed their CEO to “slow down” work on the SF to SJ section pending clarification and resolution of the above mentioned issues. Since that board meeting, the Authority and Caltrain have worked together to further understand the implications of the April 18th statement for both agencies. More recently the Bay Area Council has requested the Metropolitan Transportation Commission [MTC] to play a stronger role in coordinating a single high-speed rail project vision for the Peninsula⁽²⁾. Subsequently these two organizations have been involved in meetings with Caltrain and the Authority.

The Caltrain Planning Process

Since the Eshoo, Simitian and Gordon statement on High Speed Rail in April of 2011, Caltrain has taken the lead on a planning process that not only looks at the issues outlined above, but also examines a variety of community concerns regarding, grade separations, local traffic concerns and train service planning. Caltrain in consultation with the CHSRA and their consultants have focused on the following three efforts:

1. Defining a planning process for developing a vision / project for the peninsula corridor;
2. Conducting additional service plan / operational analysis to supplement the blended operations capacity analysis; and
3. Conducting a grade crossing and traffic analysis to identify needed crossing upgrades to support the blended operation.

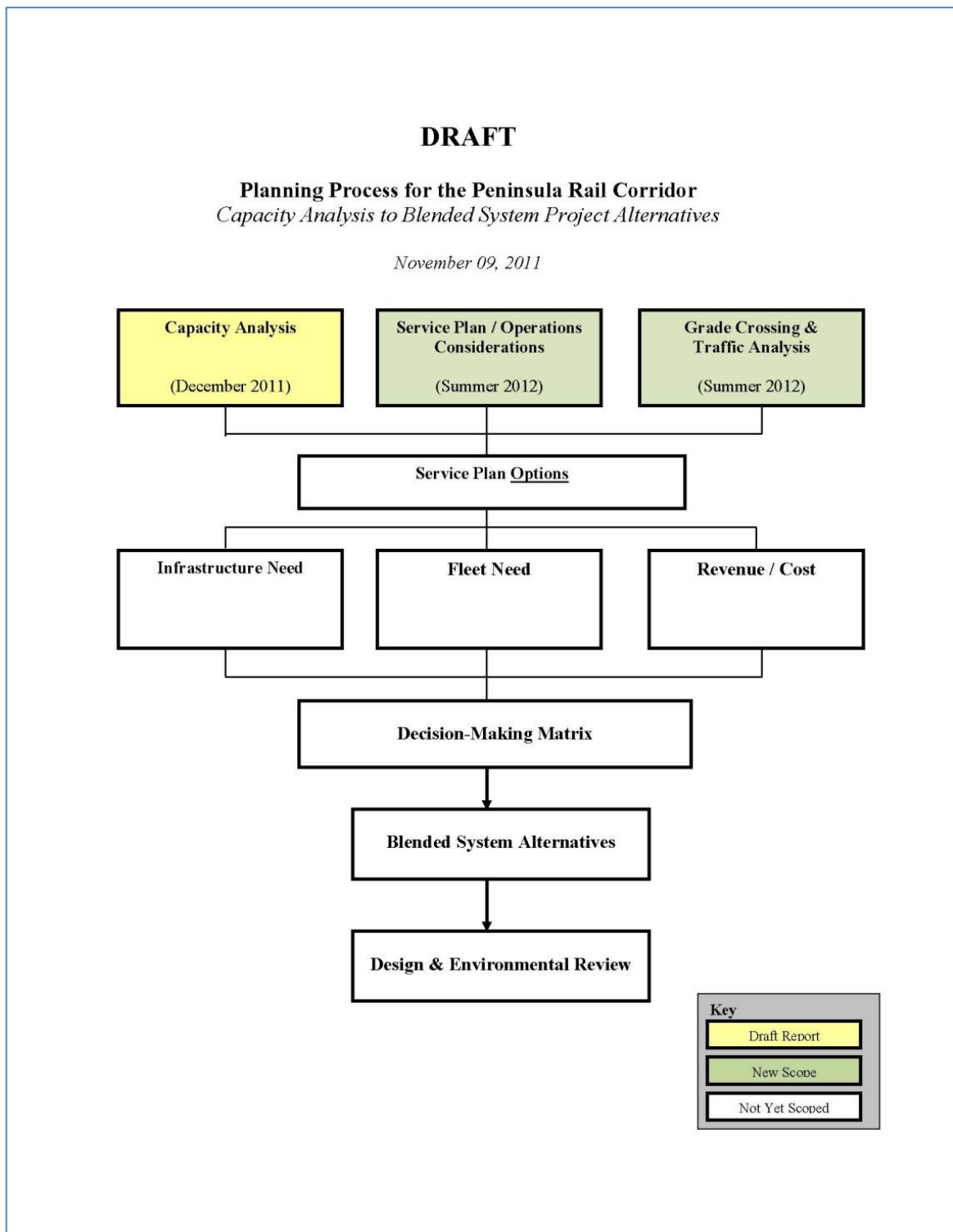
To date, a draft planning process (see below Figure 1 below) and summary scope of work for the planning efforts have been developed and shared with the corridor stakeholders. While Caltrain is taking the lead on this planning process, the CHSRA is supporting and contributing to the effort through technical and administrative assistance.

The timeframe for the completion of this overall planning process is approximately a year from now.

Progress on the planning process can be found on the Caltrain website:

http://www.caltrain.com/projectsplans/Projects/Caltrain_Modernization_Program/High_Speed_Rail_Coordination.html

Figure 1
Caltrain's Planning Process for Blended Systems and Operations on the Peninsula Rail Corridor



Operational Studies

As part of the planning process outlined above, Caltrain has made significant progress in determining what capacity could be realized on the Caltrain corridor in order to implement a blended operations approach for the Peninsula. The HST service would require at least four trains per hour per direction to serve the estimated passenger demand to and from the Peninsula and San Francisco. Caltrain has focused its operations simulation efforts on studying scenarios with six Caltrain trains and four high-speed trains per hour per direction and six Caltrain trains and two high-speed trains per hour per direction. The results of this initial study were recently published by Caltrain. The report concluded:

- “A blended operation on the Caltrain Corridor where Caltrain and high-speed trains are sharing tracks is conceptually feasible.
- An electrified system with an advanced signal system and electric trains increases the ability to support future train growth in the corridor.
- The blended system without passing tracks for train overtakes can reliably support up to 6 Caltrain trains and 2 high speed rail trains per peak hour per direction.
- The blended system with passing tracks for overtakes can reliably support up to 6 Caltrain trains and 4 high speed rail trains per peak hour per direction.
- Supporting high speed rail trains result in non-uniform Caltrain headways.
- Increasing speeds from up to 79 mph to 110 mph decreases travel times for both rail services.

The finding from this analysis should be viewed as a “proof of concept” in analyzing the conceptual feasibility of blended operations.”

(P. 5 *Caltrain/California HSR Blended Operations Analysis* Caltrain: March, 2012)

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) “High Speed Rail Early Investment Strategy for a Blended System...” between the Authority, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), Caltrain and other transit agencies and cities.

On April 12, 2012 the Authority approved an MOU with the MTC (acting as the lead agency) to work collaboratively on an early investment strategy for the Caltrain corridor. As was outlined in the MOU, the early investment strategy for the Caltrain corridor included electrification of the line from San Francisco to Tamien (just south of San Jose Diridon station), the associated train equipment and also the implementation of Caltrain’s CBOSS PTC (train control) system. The MOU outlined a funding strategy and recommended that the appropriate technical studies be completed to make the project funding and construction possible.

Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Partially Revised Final Program Environmental Impact Report

On April 19th, 2012 the Authority Board de-certified the Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Revised Final Program EIR, heard public comment on the Partially Revised Final Program EIR, deliberated, and certified the Partially Revised Final Program EIR for compliance with CEQA. The Board then approved

and adopted Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Considerations, adopted the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and approved the Pacheco Pass network alternative serving San Francisco via San Jose. The Authority Board also directed staff to:

“...proceed with consultations and discussions with the appropriate local government and transportation agencies to develop a detailed description of a second-tier project for the HST system between San Francisco and San Jose along the Caltrain corridor that is focused on a blended system approach. The Authority further directs staff that a second-tier, project-level EIR for the San Francisco to San Jose section of the HST system shall be focused solely on a blended system approach.”

With the new Bay Area to Central Valley Program EIR decisions, the Authority can also move forward with its on-going project level evaluations for the San Jose to Merced section of the system.

Caltrain Corridor Environmental Status

Based on the April 19, 2012 Board direction given above, the Authority and Caltrain need to meet and discuss the possible next steps for the environmental clearance of the Caltrain corridor and the required project elements that are included in that blended system evaluation.

Caltrain has planned to electrify their rail line for several years and in 2009, the Federal Transit Administration issued a Findings of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment under NEPA. However the PCJPB Board has not yet approved an Environmental Impact Report under CEQA for the proposed electrified Caltrain system.

The Authority started its environmental evaluation of the SF to SJ section of the statewide system in January of 2009 and got as far as publishing its Supplemental Alternatives Analysis in August of 2010 before suspending the process at the Board’s direction in May of 2011.

High-Speed Rail Outreach on the Caltrain Corridor

Although engineering and environmental activities did not move forward over the last year, there was continued public and stakeholder outreach by Authority consultants to support the Caltrain planning work and updates to stakeholders on the development of the 2012 Business Plan. Specifically much of the Business Plan outreach was to describe how the blended approach would work on the Peninsula and as part of the statewide high speed train system. Consultant staff also coordinated with stakeholders regarding the early investment strategy and the MOU with MTC.

Next Steps

Caltrain needs to complete its community driven planning process to help define what a blended solution might look like. The Authority is a meaningful participant in that process and will continue to advocate for the operational needs of the statewide system. Caltrain and the Authority should plan on defining at least one or two different blended operations alternatives through a transparent planning process, prior to formally restarting the environmental process. With better defined blended operations alternatives for environmental evaluation, likelihood of community acceptance of the project on the Peninsula will be much greater.

Given the continued moratorium on engineering and environmental work on the SF to SJ section the Authority consultant staff is very limited in its participation in this planning process. The Program Management Team (PMT) is able to provide operational analysis and input, but the regional consultant is limited in its ability to provide engineering and environmental input into the process. The Board direction to staff at the April 19th meeting would to allow the PMT along with the Regional Consultant staff to engage in engineering and environmental evaluation of possible blended system/operations solutions.